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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine differences between elementary and secondary preservice teachers in their preference for various instructional methods and goals in their professional education courses. Subjects were 129 elementary and 110 secondary students enrolled in a course required for teacher certification and usually the last course taken before student teaching. To measure preference toward instructional methods, the participants responded to 16 items which called for the expression of attitudes toward professor and student behavior in lecture, group discussion, individual oral reports, case studies, panel discusion, and various audio-visual aids. To determine preference for course goals, six goals were specified--learning facts, developing oral expression, developing library research skills, developing thinking skills, presenting and defending ideas in class, and developing independent learners. Five general statements were also presented concerning the value of quizzes, the importance of course organization, the importance of the professor's learning student names, the use of essay tests and the value of gearing the course to only the brightest students. Results showed that elementary teachers had statistically different preferences in five teaching methods, one course goal, and one organizational concept. They preferred to learn in a group and did not favor individual oral presentations. They also preferred classes to be well organized and kept on schedule, and believed the most important goal of a college class to be the development of independent learners. It is suggested that the college teacher can provide a variety of learning activities that will increase student interest and motivation while serving as a model of a caring teacher, interested in the preferences both of the group and the individual. (JD)

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Instructional Methods and Course Goals Preferred by Preservice Elementary and Secondary Teachers

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College teachers of future teachers have a special responsibility to their students not only to help them efficiently learn the cognitive goals of their courses but also to serve as models worthy of imitation. McKeachie (1978) has described the importance of teachers as models for their students where their warmth and encouragement influence student motivation to learn and to follow the example of the model. The importance of the interaction between personal needs and learning is illustrated by the research by Hunt (1975) and Cronbach and Snow (1977). Hunt believes the Behavior-Person Environment paradigm best explains learning but can be enhanced by the following inquiry: "Which instructional approach is better for whom, and for what purpose?" Cronbach and Snow, after reviewing the research on Aptitude-Treatment-Interaction, concluded that understanding the factors that help students learn under one instructional plan and not another is one of the most important goals for all levels of education.

The influence of various instructional practices in classroom teaching was described by Bloom (1976) who estimated that in general the quality of instruction can account for one-fourth of the variance on relevant cognitive achievement measures. He further stated:

> It is the teaching not the teacher that is central and it is the environment for learning in the classroom rather than the physical characteristics of the class and classroom that is important for school learning (p. 111).

The purpose of this research was to determine if there were differences between elementary and secondary preservice teachers in their preference for various instructional methods and goals in their professional education courses.

In this study, preference for instructional methods and course goals was used rather than the concept of learning styles which was used by Dunn, Dunn, and Price (1979) and Smith (1976). Gage and Berliner (1984) make a clear distinction between style and method in classroom teaching where style is illustrated by the teacher's movement about the room, gestures, tone and volume of voice, and degree of enthusiasm. Method refers to formal, self-conscious aspects of teaching and is concerned with the kinds of learning activities that take place. Instructional methods and course goals are more easily understood than learning styles by preservice teachers and college faculty members because of their many years of experience with these concepts. Further, methods and goals are easier to modify or eliminate than styles since they are directly under the control of professors and students.

Previous research tends to support the importance of matching student preferences with instructional practices to achieve higher motivation and learning. James (1962) attempted to enhance student achievement in Air Force trainees by comparing student preference for reading or lecture modes. He found two significant interactions--reading produced higher achievement and the reading preference produced greater achievement for higher ability students. But he also found that the highest achievement was earned by trainees who had no instructional preference. The limitations of the study are that no objective measure of preference for instruction was used, the "lecture" was listening to a tape recording, and no attitude measures toward instruction were used.

Domino (1971) studied college students and found that those with independent learning orientations learned more and preferred an unstructured course, whereas students who were more conforming did better in structured courses. Both groups gave their courses higher evaluations than students who

were not matched with their preferred learning orientation. Kolb (1976) identified four learning styles--abstract, concrete, experimental and observational. He found public school teachers tend to prefer active, concrete educational experiences and rely on subjective judgments as a basis for decision making.

Pascal (1971), using college sophomores, studied the effects of matching instructional strategies to student learning style preferences for lecture, lecture-discussion and independent study. His findings indicate students who learned in their preferred learning style had a more positive attitude toward the course than students who could not use their preferred learning style. Although no differences in course grade or course evaluation were found between students in preferred and non-preferred learning style, 93.5 percent preferred having learning style options and 91.6 percent felt learning style options provided them with "freedom and individualization."

Smith (1976) researched teaching method preference by developing a 54-item instrument that measured nine different instructional strategies: (1) projects, (2) drill and recitation, (3) peer teaching, (4) discussion, (5) teaching games, (6) independent study, (7) programmed instruction, (8) lecture, and (9) simulation. She then used the instrument in an experiment with young adolescents who were matched in instructional preference for lecture, discussion and simulation. She found that the teaching method preference correlated .38 with achievement and .23 with motivation. Smith concluded students differ in their preference for teaching modalities and that teaching method matching can significantly enhance educational outcomes.

The subjects in this study were all the undergraduate students enrolled in the course, School Organization, Administration and Community Relations, in the School of Education and Allied Professions at Miami University. The

course is required of all students seeking teacher certification and is usually the last professional course taken before student teaching. The sample consisted of 327 students, 129 elementary, 110 secondary, and 83 in an "other" category such as speech pathology or recreation. Only the findings for elementary and secondary preservice teachers are presented in this study. To measure preference toward instructional methods the author developed a Likert-type instrument of 16 items which called for the expression of attitude toward professor and student behavior in lecture, group discussions, individual oral reports, case studies, panel discussions, and various audio-visual aids. The reliability of these items as determined by coefficient alpha was .65. To determine preference for course goals, six goals were specified--learning facts, developing oral expression, developing library research skills, developing thinking skills, presenting and defending ideas in class, and developing independent learners. Five general statements were also presented concerning the value of quizzes, the importance of course organization, the importance of the professor's learning student names, the use of essay tests and the value of gearing the course to only the brightest students.

Each of the 27 statements were analyzed by comparing the two groups using the Chi square statistic. The .05 level was selected for determining statistical significance.

Results

Elementary preservice teachers are significantly different in their attitudes from secondary preservice teachers in five teaching methods, one course goal, and on the importance of course organization. They believe that

case studies should be analyzed during class and that students should attend class and not learn alone. They also disagree with secondary candidates by placing greater value on participation in class discussions but they do not favor presenting individual oral reports to the class. Further, elementary candidates favor serving on a panel and believe that developing independent learners is the most important goal of a college class. They also have a stronger preference for college courses to be well organized and kept on a schedule. Table I presents these findings.

[Insert Table I here]

The implications of these findings for the college teacher are that elementary preservice teachers prefer to learn in a group and place a high priority on well organized courses that are kept on a schedule. Since they prefer to learn in a group, their motivation to learn will be enhanced if professors use group discussion and panel presentations as methods for learning. The finding that elementary preservice teachers prefer not to give oral reports in class is consistent with the group learning orientation expressed by this sample. Further research on this preference for instruction is justified because classroom teachers make oral presentations daily and future teachers must learn to perform this task well to be effective.

College classes and individual students can profit from understanding both individual and group preferences for instructional activities and course goals. By providing this information to classes, the college teacher helps students understand themselves as individual learners and as a member of a group of learners. Further, by using expressed group preferences, the college teacher can provide a variety of learning activities that will increase student interest and motivation while serving as a model of a caring teacher, interested in the preferences of the class and individual.

Table I

Instructional Methods and Course Goals
Preferred by Elementary Teacher Candidates

	$X^2(4, N=239)$
Case studies are analyzed in class	13.87**
Students should attend class meetings, not learn on their own	10.84*
Students participate in class discussion	17.47**
Students should not present oral reports in class	14.10**
Students serve on a panel that discusses a subject before the class	15.39**
Developing independent learners is the most important goal of a college class	13.28**
The course should be well organized and kept on a schedule	18.39**

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

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